

中流 / *Chūryū* / Middling

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The “middle class” is a cultural formation manifesting economic conditions but not tied to them in any fixed way. This makes it inherently impossible to pin down. The word “bourgeois” in Marxist language is more easily anchored theoretically, yet it too can be made to float when treated as a cultural category. We can trace the lives of these two keywords, “bourgeois” and “middle class,” in two registers: the vernacular and the language of political economy.

Marx’s “bourgeoisie” is part of a theoretically tidy dyad defined in objective terms: either one owns the means of production or one doesn’t. The Anglo-American liberal alternative to Marx’s dyad of bourgeoisie and proletariat posits three classes, and thereby makes the objective rooting of class in the means of production impossible. Social scientists have tried repeatedly to devise objective criteria for quantifying middle-class membership, but the criteria differ with each study. All are plainly porous. In the words of Pierre Bourdieu, “Social class does not exist... What exists is a social space, a space of differences, in which classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given but as something to be done.”¹

The fact should be noted (obvious as it is) that Marx did not coin the word “bourgeoisie.” When he chose to use it rather than “capitalists” or some other locution, he could rely on immediate recognition among his European intellectual audience, and

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Space: Introduction to a Japanese Reading of *Distinction*,” trans. Gisele Sapiro, *Poetics Today* 12:4 (Winter, 1991), 637.

probably among many a shared sense of contempt. In vernacular language, both “middle class” and “bourgeois” are slippery terms, because both function as cultural signifiers for bundles of habits and appearances. While the influence of Marx has often given “bourgeois” undesirable nuances (at least outside France), capitalist society makes middlingness inherently desirable. Where social status is believed to be something that properly must be achieved rather than inherited, to be “middle class” sets one apart from the failed lower orders as well as from the hereditarily privileged (and thus potentially undeserving) upper class, making it the preferred location to claim. Whoever can claim this position then takes on the task of fleshing it out with a set of manifest traits. But “bourgeois” too as a cultural category calls forth a broad field of connotations. Peter Gay, for example, was able to write his five volumes on “the bourgeois experience” because he could draw upon a rich array of nineteenth-century people’s narratives of their own bourgeoisdom—self-identifications, contemporary stereotypes and normative claims—as well as on other historians’ retrospective categorizations. He could thus analyze bourgeois people and their lifestyles without being compelled to denote precisely who was in and who was out on the basis of direct, literal ownership of the means of material production. Nineteenth-century Europeans spoke of what it meant to be bourgeois (or *burger*, etc.) in diverse ways without reference to Marx.² Marx himself, a consummate stylist (in contrast to the “scientific Marxists” among his heirs), read his audience with a canny sense of how they would read him.

Middlingness emerged in late nineteenth century Japanese popular discourse under the name *chūryū* (also *chūtō shakai*, *chūkyūmin*). It was most of all a normative

² For his loose formulation of “bourgeois,” see Peter Gay, *Education of the Senses*, 17-44. Although I believe a project like Gay’s is equally possible in Japan, I do not mean to imply that Gay’s Freudian reading of nineteenth-century private lives should provide a model for Japanese cultural history.

moral term. Advocates frequently stressed that the middle was the backbone (*chūken*) of society. The middle class was described as the productive class.³ As a cultural category, *chūryū* is found particularly in women's magazines. To be *chūryū* in Meiji was to be a Westernizing progressive. Yet dominant class legitimacy and broader *chūryū* respectability relied equally on appropriation and reinterpretation of native cultural practices. The critical thing was mastery, demonstrating knowledge of both the native and the Western, rather than merely emulating Westerners. The middle-class home (*chūryū katei*) was managed by a mistress whose secondary education had taught her a vocation devoted to imported disciplines of hygiene and efficiency, and to the education of her children. In material terms, many of the lifestyles shown as “middling” in women's magazines like *Jogaku sekai* (Women's Education World) and *Fujin gahō* (Ladies' Graphic) actually belonged to people who would have to be judged upper class in terms of income, but they provided the models for imagining the newly invented social middle, characterized particularly by secondary education in the post-Meiji system and the tastes that accompanied it.

Chūryū in these first years was only minimally theorized as a political concept. The same could be said of the idea of the “bourgeoisie” in the early years of Japanese socialism prior to World War I and the Russian revolution. Critical political thought about class at this stage was rooted more in a moral critique of wealth than a generalized conception of bourgeois hegemony. Hence Kōtoku Shūsui and Sakai Toshihiko, who first translated the *Communist Manifesto* in the socialist weekly *Heimin shinbun* in 1904,

³ David Ambaras analyzes some of the early political discourse around the idea of a middle class during the 1870s and 1880s prior to popular use of the term *chūryū*. See David Ambaras, “Social Knowledge, Cultural Capital and the New Middle Class in Japan, 1895-1912,” *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 24:1 (Winter, 1998), 1-8.

struggled with Marx's moral agnosticism and therefore also with the problem of how to render his class terms in Japanese. In the earliest translations, the bourgeoisie were alternately *shihonka* (“capitalists”), which limited the word's scope and shed its cultural connotations; and *shinshi* (a Confucian term meaning something like “gentleman”), which omitted the bourgeoisie's relationship to the means of production.⁴

Concern for urban living standards affected by inflation in the 1910s helped to define the middle as a political entity. In these years, locutions like *chūryū* were joined by a term more explicitly rooted in political economy: *chūsan kaikyū*, which literally translates as “middle property class.” Newspapers began to speak of the crisis of “middle class” company employees and civil servants who, because of the need to maintain appearances, had less flexibility than the poor and were therefore actually worse off when inflation affected their paychecks.⁵ These references to appearances make clear that, whatever the precise label used, this middle class was a cultural formation. It was only in the 1920s that representatives of white-collar workers would make common cause by creating a “salaryman's union,” thereby also adopting the name “salaryman,” the class (or class/gender) label that would prove the most enduring. Liberal journalism thus could be said to have created a middle class with common class interests before the members of this class themselves had articulated an explicit class identity.

Bureaucrats in the 1920s also began to view the middle as a social issue. In 1922, the Tokyo Municipal Social Bureau, for example, conducted a survey of incomes and

⁴ Marukusu, Engerusu cho, Kōtoku Shūsui, Sakai Toshihiko yaku, *Kyōsantō sengen*, Shōkō shoin, 1945, 10. On Kōtoku, see F.G. Notehelfer, *Kōtoku Shūsui: Portrait of a Japanese Radical*, Cambridge University Press, 1971. On the moral critique of wealth in early Japanese Marxism, see Gail Lee Bernstein, *Japanese Marxist: A Portrait of Kawakami Hajime, 1879-1946*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976.

⁵ E.g. *Yomiuri shinbun*, March 1st, 1911; April 18, 1912. Nukada Yutaka, *Anka seikatsu hō*, Seikyōsha, 1915.

living standards among “middle-class” (*chūtō kaikyū*) households in the city and its adjoining suburbs, with the stated aim of establishing a middle-class standard for the purposes of “fusing the upper and lower classes.” In the introduction to the resulting report, the authors spoke of recent fears of the extinction of the middle classes and of the danger of class warfare. These must be countered, they argued, by support for the middle, which included people living on salaries, the majority of the self-employed and managers of small to mid-size shops, owner-cultivators, and part of the population segment deriving their incomes from pensions or rents.⁶ This survey was among the first officially-sponsored attempts to define and measure the middle, and thereby to call it into being as a social fact.

For a brief period after World War I, popular and sociometric languages interbred. On the one hand, we see the first attempt to establish a social science of the *chūryū* in the work of US-educated economist Morimoto Kōkichi, who ironically found it to be a “decaying class” (*horobiyuku kaikyū*) just at the moment that it had finally been located objectively. Morimoto developed a group of economic variables to define what he called an “efficient standard of living,” achievement of which placed one in the middle class.⁷ In his pessimistic assessment, only two percent of the population was maintaining this efficient standard in 1919. *Chūryū* advocates had been speaking of the class as threatened

⁶ Tōkyōfu naimubu shakaika, *Tōkyōshi oyobi kinsetsu chōson chūtō kaikyū seikei chōsa* (1922), *sōsetsu*, 1. Andrew Gordon points out that the term “people living on salaries” (*hōkyū seikatsusha*) also had a specific political valence in the context of 1920s class language. The architects of the salaried workers’ union movement conspicuously avoided calling themselves “workers,” preferring the term *seikatsusha*, which distinguished them from the laboring masses. Andrew Gordon, “The Short Happy Life of the Japanese Middle Class,” in *Social Contracts under Stress: the Middle Classes of America, Europe, and Japan at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Olivier Zunz, Leonard Schoppa, and Nobuhiro Hiwatari, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002. See also William Kelly, “At the Limits of New Middle Class Japan: Beyond Mainstream Consciousness,” in the same volume, 232-254. The essays by Gordon and Kelly both provide valuable discussions of the Japanese middle class as an ideological issue.

⁷ Morimoto Kōkichi, *Horobiyuku kaikyū*, Dōbunkan, 1924. On Morimoto, see Terade Kōji, *Seikatsu bunkaron e no shōtai*, Kōbundō, 1994.

with decline and even extinction since the term's early use in the writings of Tokutomi Sohō in the 1880s.⁸ Morimoto's analysis was the first in a tradition of scholarly efforts to anchor the endangered *chūryū* in quantifiable social factors and thereby determine the size of its membership.

At the same time, mediated by the sudden fashionability of Marx, the word “bourgeois” (*burujōa* or *burujōwa*) moved into popular discourse in the 1920s. It was joined by a number of new class terms like “educated property-less class” (*yūshiki musan kaikyū*) and “mental laborers” (*seishinteki rōdōsha*). The journalistic penchant for abbreviation soon generated other terms using the compact two-syllable *buru* (“bourgeois”), such as *buru bunshi* (bourgeois writer) and *puchi buru* (petite bourgeoisie). Once transliterated, the term “bourgeois” thus easily wandered free of its Marxist origins. Excoriating the latest Tokyo trends in 1924, Kyūshū native Yumeno Kyūsaku declared in a pithy phrase that the then fashionable idea of “cultured living” simply meant “becoming bourgeois” (*bunka wa buruka*).⁹

Behind these lexical developments lay the fact that mass society had destabilized the cultural markers undergirding the moral discourse of *chūryū*. As things Western became commonplace, their class connotations could be inverted. Native dress is one example. By the 1920s, more people in the first and second-class compartments of the train wore *wafuku* (Japanese dress) while in the third-class compartment, men wore *yōfuku* (Western attire). An employee in the Railroad Ministry told the *Yomiuri shinbun* he suspected that it had become more “bourgeois” to travel in *wafuku* now that every

⁸ See David Ambaras, “Social Knowledge, Cultural Capital and the New Middle Class in Japan, 1895-1912,” *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 24:1 (Winter, 1998); and Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*.

⁹ Yumeno, “Gaitō kara mita shin Tōkyō no rimen” (1924); see Sand, *House and Home in Modern Japan*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003, 341.

proverbial Tom, Dick and Harry (*dare mo kamo*) wore Western clothes.¹⁰ The struggling lower strata of white-collar male workers in the 1920s came to be known as “paupers in Western clothes.” But once the established terms had been reversed, it was difficult to recover the security of clothing as a class-marker. Kon Wajirō’s famous survey of styles on the Ginza in 1925, while on the one hand revealing certain stable uniforms for such proletarians as shophands and manual laborers, also made visible the costumes and performance of many new roles that stretched class-cultural definitions.¹¹

At some point in the 1930s, the term *burujoa* appears to have been driven from the open fields of the vernacular and returned to the Marxist social scientific fold, where it lived on to the late 1970s as an economic rather than a cultural category. A bit of fast-and-dirty cliometry using the *Yomiuri shinbun* newspaper databases yields the following: the *katakana* words for “bourgeois” (*burujoa* and *burujowa*) appear 92 times in the years 1912-1926; 219 times in the years 1927-1936; and only 5 times in the years 1937-1945. This suggests that mobilization for total war and the tightening of censorship that accompanied it may have put an end to popular use of the term.¹²

The postwar years would see a brief revival of *burujowa*. Another site for the interbreeding of popular and social scientific language, and one of obvious political significance, is the National Diet. For the postwar years, a digital database now permits an easy quantitative look at terms used in Diet debate. Aggregate counts of the number of times the word was uttered annually reveal the return of the term “bourgeois” to

¹⁰ *Yomiuri shinbun*, January 23rd, 1926.

¹¹ See Miriam Silverberg, “Constructing the Japanese Ethnography of Modernity” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 51:1 (February, 1992), 30-54.

¹² I say “fast and dirty” because the *Yomiuri* database permits only searches of an index of key words and phrases rather than the full text of the original articles, so that numbers inevitably reflect to some extent the judgments of the researchers who compiled it. The index is extraordinarily thorough, however.

legitimacy in the early postwar years, presumably through the agency of the Japan Communist Party, and marked decline thereafter: *katakana* transliterations of “bourgeois” or “bourgeoisie” were heard in the diet 112 times between its opening in May, 1947 and the end of December, 1954—roughly 15 times annually on average. The frequency plunged in the following decade (1955 through 1964) to less than five times annually. By the late 1970s, these terms were spoken on average less than once per year. All this is much as we might expect in the broad context of political trends after 1945. The phrase *chūsan kaikyū* (middle-property class) shows a similar but gentler decline, without ending in complete obscurity. Usage was roughly 16 times annually until the mid-1960s, then fell to about half this for the next decade, then fell again, leveling off at around five times average per year after the mid-1970s. It should be noted that many of these utterances were made with reference to the middle classes in foreign countries.¹³

Among sociological studies, Ōhashi Ryūken’s *Nihon no kaikyū kōsei* (The Class Composition of Japan), published in 1971, and one of the standard works on the subject of class written after the war, defined four classes in postwar Japan. Ōhashi’s breakdown featured no “middle class,” but a working class that included salaried workers as well as factory workers and non-self employed farmers and fisherfolk, and distinguished this large group from the self-employed, the military, and the capitalists. For the prewar period, *Nihon no kaikyū kōsei* distinguished a large “middle stratum” (*chūkansō*) that included farmers with under 5 *chō* of land as well as white-collar workers. Ōhashi’s tabulation was based primarily on the national census, which at the first level of classification is a poor instrument for class analysis (and probably intentionally so) since it classifies people according to the category of production into which their occupations

¹³ This data comes from the on-line full-text record of Diet debate, *Kokkai kaigiroku*.

fall, regardless of their individual relations to the means of production. Hence, in the basic census count, factory hands and foremen, miners and mine managers are all classified simply as industry employees. In any case, Ōhashi's study made no effort to imagine the "bourgeoisie" here as more than the owners of capital and their executives, and showed no interest in the question of what marked them culturally.

From the late 1970s, popular language and self-conceptions began driving social scientific concerns more, as academic debate erupted around the question of middlingness. Conservative sociologist Murakami Yasusuke sparked controversy with a short essay published in the *Asahi shinbun* in the summer of 1977 claiming that Japan had become a homogeneous middle mass society (*Shin chūkan taishū shakai*), with no upper or lower classes pressing in on either side. Marxian sociologists responded that in fact, Japan's white-collar masses were proletarians.¹⁴

New ways of talking of the middle appeared in politics simultaneously. Until 1977, the word *chūryū* appears in Diet debate as an expression of class on average around a dozen times per year, usually in connection with economic and social issues: taxes and utility rates, education and juvenile delinquency, as well as farm conditions. An abrupt change of rhetoric occurs in 1977. Speakers cease to use the word to denote a social or economic reality. When uttered after 1977, in phrases such as *iwayuru chūryū* ("the so-

¹⁴ Murakami's article is translated together with responses from Kishimoto Shigenobu and Tominaga Ken'ichi in *The Japan Interpreter* vol. XII, no.1 (Winter, 1978). Anglo-American liberalism entered on the sidelines here in the form of the Vogel family. *Japan's New Middle Class* had been published in Japanese translation in 1968 (Sasaki Tetsurō trans., *Nihon no shin chūkan kaikyū*). Vogel felt no compunction to establish theoretical definitions, taking households of white-collar men to be "middle class" and focusing on an ethnographic portrait of them. Incidentally, in the same issue of *Japan Interpreter* that translated Murakami and the related classification debates, we find Suzanne Vogel writing of a "middle class" in Japan whose existence she assumes without feeling compelled to define. See "Professional Housewife: The Career of Urban Middle Class Japanese Women," in *ibid*.

called *chūryū*”), *ichioku sōchūryūka* (“everyone becoming *chūryū*”), and particularly *chūryū ishiki* (“*chūryū* consciousness”), the word wears inverted commas.¹⁵

Behind this development lay not only the sociologists’ debate, but the public opinion statistics collected by the Prime Minister’s office, in which 90% of respondents in the 1970s placed themselves in the “middle.” References in the Diet to the *chūryū* from this time were almost without exception making some allusion, either laudatory or critical, to these famous survey results. The surveys themselves dated back to 1959, when the public relations office of the Prime Minister began asking a random sample population a series of questions about living and lifestyle under the name of the Opinion Survey about National Life (*Kokumin seikatsu yoron chōsa*). Respondents were asked here to locate their living (*kurashimuki*) or their “level of living” (*seikatsu no teido*) somewhere on a chart from low to high, usually with three middle strata, two upper and two lower. The aggregate of respondents who placed themselves in these middle strata was already 73% of the total in 1959. This figure had risen to 87% by 1964. In 1970, it hit 90%.¹⁶ The survey question is a study in vagueness, avoiding use of any word implying “class,” as well as avoiding specificity about the contours of *seikatsu* or *kurashi* (terms used in common parlance with the senses both of economic livelihood and, more generally, of daily life or lifestyle).

It was already widely known that 90% of respondents had chosen one of the “middles” when the topic first surfaced in Diet debate. On November 1st, 1977, a few months after the “new middle” debate in the Asahi newspaper, the Diet Record preserves an exchange between Kitayama Yoshirō (愛郎) of the Socialist Party and two members

¹⁵ *Kokkai kaigiroku*.

¹⁶ Inuta Mitsuru, *Nihonjin no kaisō ishiki: “chūryū” no yomikata, toraekata* (PHP kenkyūsho, 1982), 29, 16 (chart).

of the government in which the three try to disentangle the meaning of “*chūryū* consciousness” as represented in the Prime Minister’s Office surveys.¹⁷ The issue surfaced in politics at this moment—rather than when the momentous 90% was reached seven years earlier—because in this year the Economic Planning Agency had chosen for the first time to include discussion of *chūryū* consciousness (based on the Prime Minister’s Office data) alongside analysis of more conventional economic indicators in its annual *White Paper on the Economy*. Addressing a representative of the Planning Agency, Kitayama demanded an explanation of what constituted *chūryū* for the surveyors, asserting that they must have had “some objective criteria” in mind in order to pose the question. The representative responded that the survey dealt entirely with consciousness, that it asked, in effect, “what category does your household fall into in the eyes of society in general?” Unsatisfied, Kitayama turned to Minister of State Kuranari for an answer. “There’s usually a gap between consciousness and reality,” he insisted. What was the point of presenting a statistic that 90% of the nation *believed* they were *chūryū* if they were wrong? The Minister of State took a different tack in response. “It is extremely difficult” to determine the limits of what is *chūryū*, he explained, so they had borrowed the Prime Minister’s office statistics showing “what people’s consciousness was in the larger flow of life.” Kitayama put in the last word, holding to his position that asking members of the public “are you *chūryū*?” therefore yielded information without value.

Kitayama’s insistence on treating *chūryū* as an objective category seems at first merely to miss the point, which is clarified for him by his interlocutors. Yet the Planning Agency representative, by implying that the survey told something about the relationship between the household and society, and the Minister, by suggesting that the opinion

¹⁷ *Kokkai kaigiroku*, November 1st, 1977.

survey data had been enlisted in lieu of secure objective data, remained intellectually on a plane with the socialist MP as they still clung to the threads of connection between the word and an external referent. This, however, was the last attempt in the National Diet to make the language of middlingness conform to some empirical reality. Thereafter, it was as if Japanese politicians had absorbed the lessons of Derrida and Barthes on language. *Chūryū* existed now only as a state of mind, its ontological meaning endlessly deferred. Even conservatives exulting in Japanese middlingness spoke not of “the middle classes” but of middling consciousness, transmuting the question from one of socioeconomic standards to one of national sensibilities and virtues.¹⁸

Many commentators both in and out of government since 1977 have observed that the 90% reflects respondents’ attitudes about the normative middle rather than any objective social fact.¹⁹ We may go further and view the opinion survey question from the Prime Minister’s office itself as a strategic move, using the government’s authority and surveying capacity to interpellate the masses and invoke their voices in response to pessimistic social scientists who, until Murakami’s declaration, avoided dealing with postwar Japan’s pervasively felt middlingness because it was difficult to accommodate within a Marxian historiography premised on Japanese backwardness. From the field’s beginnings, opinion researchers in Japan and elsewhere had recognized the propaganda value of opinion surveying to the state. As Tessa Morris-Suzuki has shown, Koyama Eizō, who pioneered opinion surveys in Japan during the war and became the recognized

¹⁸ As in this comment from an LDP Diet member: “I think the Japanese are a nation possessing an honest, good *chūryū* consciousness.” *Kokkai kaigiroku*, March 13th, 1987.

¹⁹ See Marilyn Ivy, “Formations of Mass Culture,” in *Postwar Japan as History*, edited by Andrew Gordon, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 239-258.

authority within both government and the academy after 1945, regarded opinion research as a state tool for the making of opinion and guidance of the public.²⁰

As sociologist Inuta Mitsuru points out, the anonymous set of respondents claiming *chūryū* status cannot in the first instance be viewed as a self-defining group in any sense. They are no more than the product of data collation based on an arbitrary list of strata.²¹ The difference between this respondent set and a group based on positive identification is made manifest by the fact that denizens of the grand statistical middle in the sphere of “living level” (*seikatsu teido*) emphatically disavow the title “middle class” (*chūsan kaikyū*) when the term is used that makes the reference to property explicit. In a 1975 survey conducted by sociologists and designed to mimic and expand upon the Prime Minister’s Office surveys, respondents were asked to place themselves in one of five strata (*kaisō*) in relation to their “living” and then, in a separate question, to identify whether they belonged to “the capitalist class” (*shihonka kaikyū*), the “middle-property class” (*chūsan kaikyū*), or the “workers’ class” (*rōdōsha kaikyū*). The majority of respondents to the first question in all strata, including fully 55% of those who placed themselves in the “upper” stratum in terms of living standards, preferred to identify themselves as members of the “workers’ class.”²² If some would read in this the death

²⁰ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Ethnic Engineering: Scientific Racism and Public Opinion Surveys in Midcentury Japan,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 8:2 (2000), 510, 515. The process of dissemination is itself important here too, as it quickly separates the statistical result from the social site of the survey. Journalists and popular writers often ignore questions about the size and nature of the sample population, methods of sampling and survey conditions and techniques. Few even refer to the precise wording of the original question. Sociologist Inuta Mitsuru has called the way in which the statistical result wanders free from its place of origin a process of poetic quotation (*honkadōri*) repeated until the original stanzas are completely lost. Inuta, 44.

²¹ It should be noted that surveyors have tried changing the number of strata in different years, yielding minor fluctuations in the results, and that the pervasive 90% figure represents respondents in all middle strata.

²² Naoi Michiko, “Kaisō ishiki to kaikyū ishiki,” in Tominaga Ken’ichi, *Nihon no kaisō kōzō*, Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 1979, 366-7. Many critics have suggested that the phrasing of the question and the presentation of strata to choose from in the Prime Minister’s Office survey are biased. However,

knell of historical materialism in a complete dissipation of meaningful class categories, others would argue for the proletarianization of the white-collar worker. In either case, it should perhaps not surprise us that, after the categories of “capitalist” and “middle-property” classes had been all but eliminated from popular discourse, people who worked for a living would call themselves—in lieu of anything else—“workers.”

The more important question is one that cannot be answered by opinion surveys: is there still anything like *class* consciousness here—even what Marx would have considered a “false” one, lacking true awareness of its historical conditions? That is, did the Japanese who called themselves *chūryū* share objectively observable traits that provided them with a common political identity? The answer seems to be that shared traits were recognized but no longer constituted a political identity. In a probing article published in 1985, political scientist Inoguchi Keiko asserted that with the ascendancy of *chūryū* rhetoric, class (*kaikyū*) had become an alien word. In comparison with *chūryū*, she pointed out, the term *chūsan kaikyū* bore with it a good deal of ideological baggage, and, in vernacular use, an air of snobbish exclusivity. *Chūryū* not only had an appealing vagueness, it seemed to be tied to things that any member of society might be able to acquire—it was available for purchase.²³ This point seems to cut to the core of the question of how the Japanese public speaks for itself when it speaks of *chūryū*. In a mass consumer society of the kind that has arisen in Japan since the late 1950s, where are consumer-subjects to turn for objective material on which to base the measure of their

sociologists posing similar questions with different wording or response choices have yielded comparable results. The real issue is that the stratification of “living” without reference to property, means of production, or some defined social identity presents a normative abstraction (which Naoi distinguishes as *kaisō* rather than *kaikyū*) into which respondents insert themselves on the basis of subjective conceptions of the relationship between themselves and the nation.

²³ Inoguchi Keiko, “Chūryū to wa shōhi no kategorii datta no ka: saika shikō no kakudai chūryū shakairon,” *Chūō kōron* 100:7 (July, 1985), 86-87.

own social place except to the largest and most visible kinds of property in their possession and in the possession of their neighbors: houses and consumer durables? Intergenerational family status is usually unknown, and Japanese companies have done their best to minimize tangible distinctions of rank among employees below the executive board level. Houses, cars, washing machines and television sets have instead provided the material markers shaping the middling consciousness made to speak its name by opinion surveys, since these things—in their broad homogeneity—could be readily observed by the respondents themselves.²⁴

The issue of how much of Japan was middling in fact rather than in perception remained alive and unresolved among social scientists, but at least in journalistic discourse it was generally accepted that Murakami's theory of the middle mass had carried the day. In 1998-2000, academics and journalists revisited Japan's middlingness, this time in the form of a debate about the "collapse of the middle" (*chūryū hōkai*), recalling Morimoto Kōkichi's anxieties seventy-five years earlier, and Tokutomi Sohō's forty years before that.²⁵ Scholars this time debated whether Japan had ceased to be an egalitarian society. The faith that it was, according to sociologist Satō Toshiki, had sustained the sense held by the majority of individuals that they themselves were *chūryū*. The question became whether this faith had become a thing of the past. Again scholars were seeking to pin down an idea of class, but this time in terms not of economic facts

²⁴ This point is made also by Inuta, 40. Naoi shows that while there is no consistent overall correlation, there are nevertheless non-negligible correlations between the respondent's choice of stratum and occupational rank or income level in certain instances.

²⁵ Andrew Gordon has also pointed out that discussions of the "middle classes" repeatedly found them in danger of extinction.

but of beliefs about economic opportunities.²⁶ For Satō, the search for objective definitions had become so vexed that he could present it only as a koan-like conundrum.

If we are speaking of a ‘working class,’ one immediately thinks of certain occupations, social statuses, and cultural traits. Even for a ‘new middle class,’ one can somehow associate a certain face with the name. Or rather, its content is defined reflectively on the basis of the external reality of the “upper class” and “working class.” Which is to say, it has no face, but in the sense that it is a class characterized by its facelessness, it has a face. In contrast with this, there isn’t even an outside to the new middle mass. Since “everyone is middle class,” the new middle mass, so to speak, doesn’t even have the ‘face’ of “not having a face.”²⁷

Late twentieth-century historians, meanwhile, rather than explore the connections between the *chūryū* cultural formation in their own era and the *buru* of an earlier generation, killed the bourgeoisie retrospectively. The multi-volume series on Japanese history published by Iwanami shoten in the 1970s still used the words *burujō* and *chūsan kaikyū*, but the new series published in the 1990s omitted them. Scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s that sought to historicize the nation-state put prewar Japan socially and culturally alongside the countries of Europe, which are commonly spoken of as “bourgeois nation states,” but Japanese critical nation-state studies did not examine the bourgeois part. The landmark collection of essays in modern cultural history, *Iwanami kōza kindai Nihon no bunkashi* (2001; ten volumes) also omitted consideration of bourgeois class culture, together with any extended discussion of class. The general editor of the series has said that in planning sessions with the scholars who organized individual volumes they discussed the theme of class precisely in order to agree that they

²⁶ The main contributions to this debate are reprinted in Chūō kōron henshūbu hen, *Ronsō: Chūryū hōkai*, Chūkū shinsho, 2001.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 192.

would not treat it as a theme.²⁸ Although international scholarly trends clearly affected the 1980s-1990s trend in Japan toward studies devoted to rethinking first the nation-state and then the colonial empire, the accompanying omission of class also brings the domestic context into view. Popular discourse had pronounced Japan a classless society. Eager to put the predictive failures of Marxism behind them, historians implicitly accepted this verdict and set about retrospectively re-writing post-Meiji history without the problem of class.

The cultural cachet of the softer word *chūryū* in popular language has disappeared too. Japanese politicians no longer make promises to the “middle class” (as they did in the 1950s and early 1960s and as politicians do in the United States), and the women’s magazines, for whom *chūryū* was once such an important pair of characters in the typesetting box, have ceased to write of *chūryū* homes and lifestyles. Middlingness, born in the realm of popular discourse, has been bequeathed to sociologists to struggle over, both its normative content and its allure forgotten by the public. Meanwhile, immersed in the present-day paradoxes of *chūryū* identity themselves, Japanese academics show little interest in historicizing it.

²⁸ Modern Japanese History Workshop, Harvard University, 2004.